

# The Daily Gleaner (Fredericton)

## HASMAT called late; MLA cries foul

Thursday, April 8, 2004

Section: News

Byline: SHANNON HAGERMAN The Daily Gleaner

Almost three hours elapsed before a regional HASMAT unit was called to an accident in which a truck filled with 17,000 kilograms of explosives went off the road outside Fredericton.

The Canadian Coast Guard, Environment Canada, a national chemical spill agency and a private company were called before the Fredericton-Oromocto HASMAT Team was contacted, officials confirmed Wednesday.

The single-vehicle accident was reported to the RCMP at about 6:54 a.m. Tuesday, but the Fredericton-Oromocto HASMAT unit didn't receive a dispatch until 9:39 a.m.

The accident occurred on Hunter Road, not far from Hanwell Road.

The delay sparked questions in the legislature Wednesday. York MLA Scott Targett demanded an explanation from Public Safety Minister Wayne Steeves.

"Why did it take so long?" Targett asked.

Steeves said everything was handled appropriately and the emergency response time was good once emergency officials were notified.

"The response time is entirely up to the RCMP. They are in charge and decide what happens," said Steeves.

"When they went there, they looked at that and said, 'OK, this is what we need and who we need and when we need them.' They are the ones in command," he told reporters.

The accident, which shut down Hunter Road for several hours, has sparked renewed calls for the provincial government to move a dynamite storage facility now located on Crown land near Yoho Lake.

Oromocto RCMP Sgt. Wayne Gallant said officials at the scene initially determined it wasn't necessary to contact the regional HASMAT unit.

"In this case, the truck wasn't overturned ... the damage to truck itself was under \$1,000," said Gallant.

"The load had not shifted. It was not damaged in any way, so really there is no spill of any kind."

Residents of four homes in the area were evacuated as a precaution Tuesday morning, but Gallant said there was never a risk of an explosion. A HASMAT unit response was requested at about 9:20 a.m. as a precautionary measure, he said. However, the

RCMP's operational control centre never called the Fredericton-Oromocto HASMAT team.

Officials at the control centre contacted Environment Canada, which forwarded calls to the Canadian Coast Guard and CANUTEC, a national chemical spill agency.

It was the Harvey Fire Department that eventually called the HASMAT unit.

Officials couldn't say Wednesday exactly when the regional team arrived, but it is believed it was on scene around 10 a.m., almost three hours after the accident occurred.

Norman Thibodeau, a consultant at the fire marshal's office, said part of the confusion occurred after emergency officials on scene believed the regional HASMAT team was en route when actually it was emergency officials from the explosive company Dyno Nobel.

"They were talking about two different agencies. One was talking Fredericton, the other was talking the company's ... when they said HASMAT had been called, everybody thought it was the Fredericton team that had come in," he said.

To avoid future confusion, Thibodeau said all local emergency response teams will be sent direct phone numbers for the Fredericton-Oromocto HASMAT unit.

This isn't the first time there has been an incident involving explosive material in the area.

A truck carrying ammonia nitrate overturned near Prince William five years ago. The danger was considerably higher, fire officials said Wednesday, because the explosive material mixed with petroleum fuel. That is the same explosive mix used in the Oklahoma federal building bombing 1995.

Targett, who has been a vocal opponent of the dynamite storage site, also questioned whether other regions of the province can handle a similar accident involving hazardous materials.

Almost a year has passed since the government announced plans to set up five regional HASMAT units in New Brunswick, but so far only one unit exists in Fredericton-Oromocto, Targett said.

Four units purchased by the provincial government are not being used, he said.

"Why are there four HASMAT trailers, clearly marked with the Province of New Brunswick logo, at

a cost in excess of \$1 million, still sitting in a snowbank in Fredericton when they should be deployed around New Brunswick to protect the rest of the province against such a mishap?" he asked.

Steeves said fire departments need to meet training requirements before the units are deployed.

"When they are trained, everything will be taken care of," he said.

© 2004 The Daily Gleaner (Fredericton)